VIKRAMADITYA'S THRONE

This was no mere perch for any monarch – the goddess Parvati herself embellished it with her thirty-two beautiful companions, whom she first cast into stone. Eventually King Vikramaditya received the throne as a gift from Lord Indra, but he little realised that it would one day be used to remind the world of his virtues and guide future rulers to greatness.

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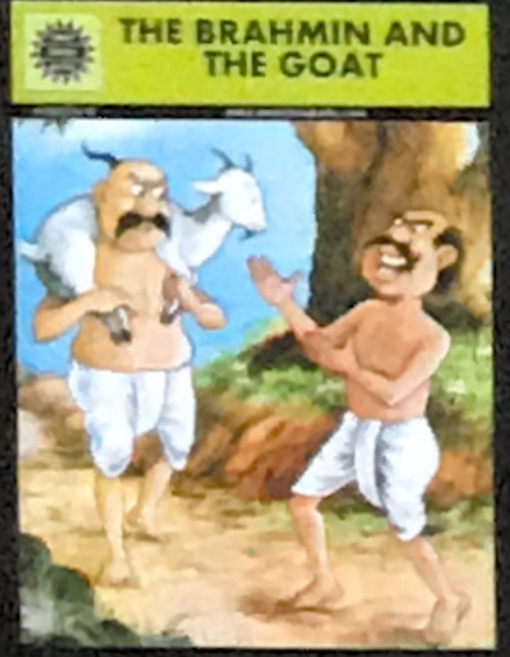

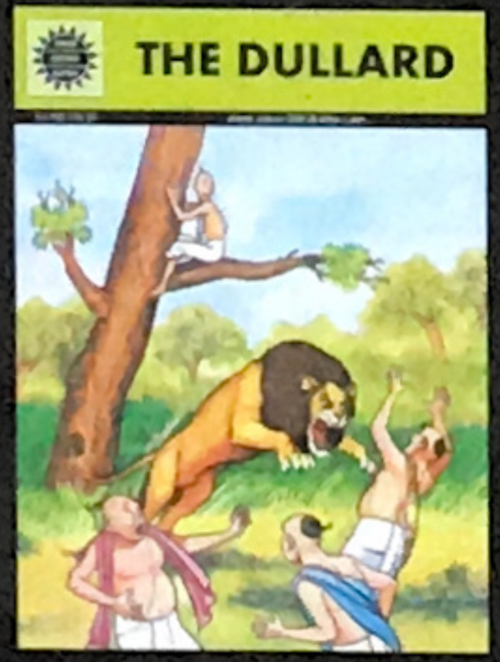

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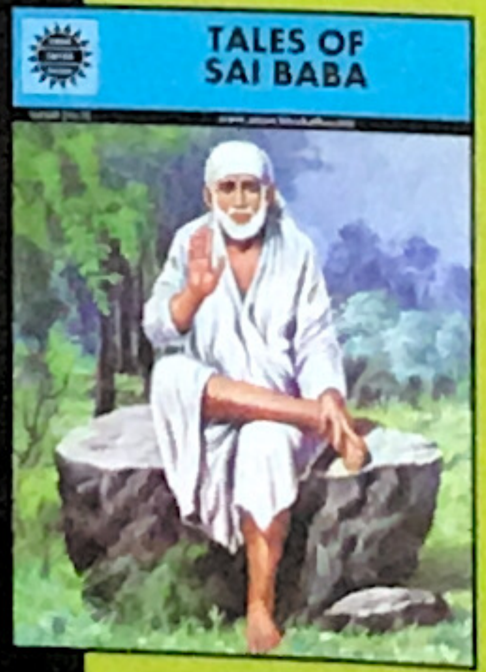

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VIKRAMADITYA'S THRONE

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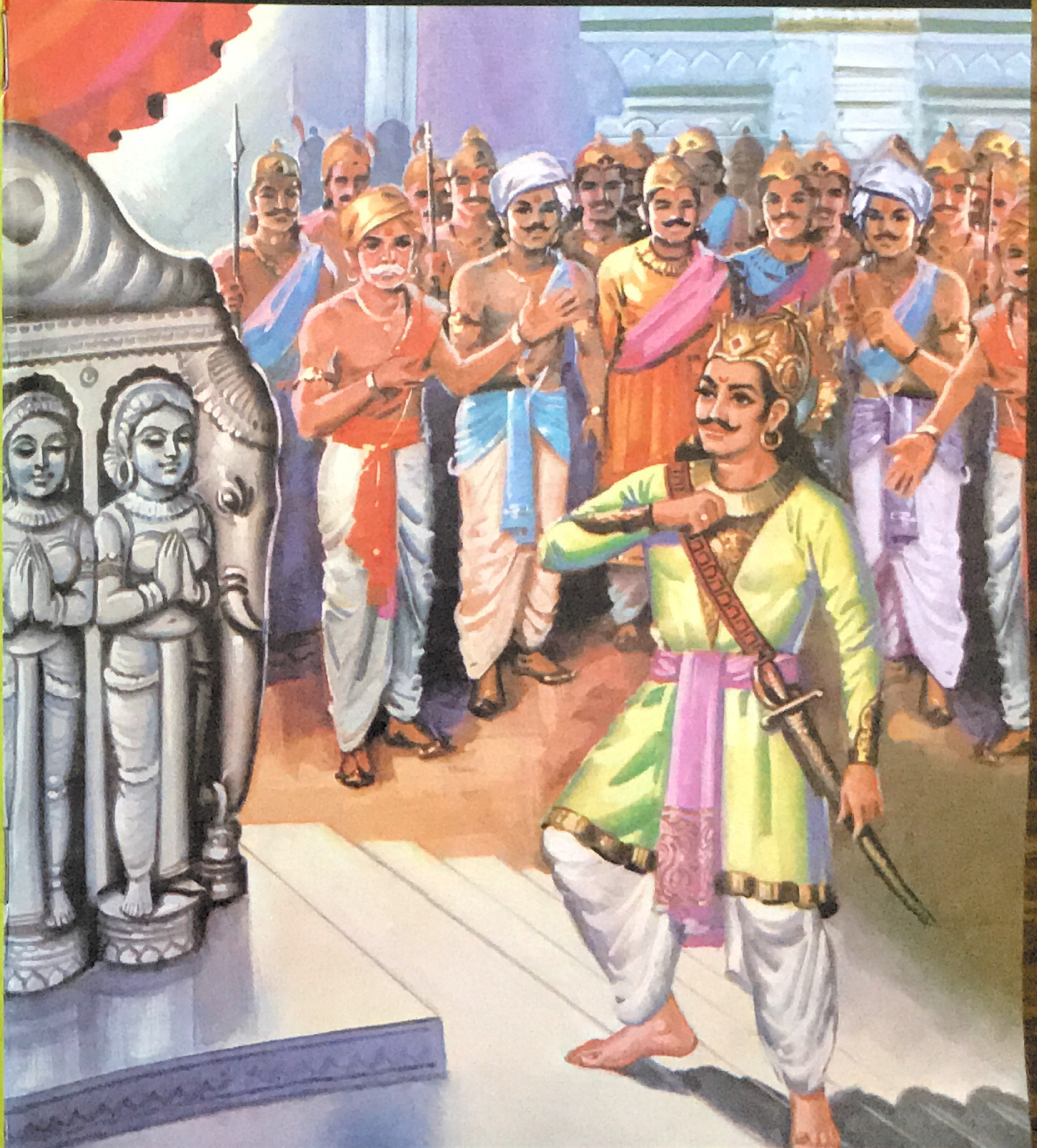
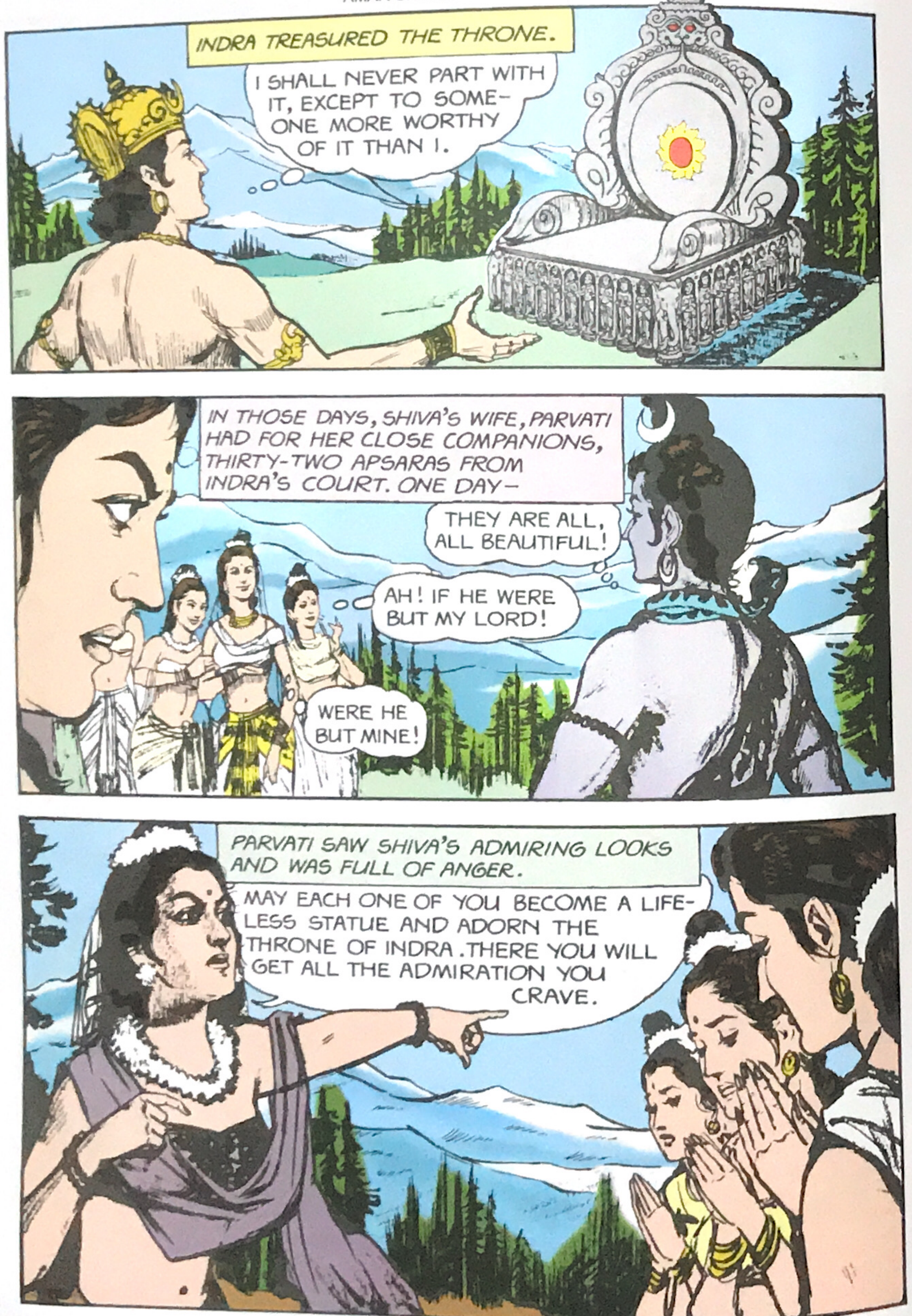


INDRA, KING OF THE GODS, HAD PLEASED SHIVA. AS A REWARD SHIVA GAVE HIM AN EXQUISITE THRONE.


INDRA TREASURED THE THRONE.
I SHALL NEVER PART WITH IT, EXCEPT TO SOME-ONE MORE WORTHY OF IT THAN I.
IN THOSE DAYS, SHIVA'S WIFE, PARVATI HAD FOR HER CLOSE COMPANIONS, THIRTY-TWO APSARAS FROM INDRA'S COURT. ONE DAY–
THEY ARE ALL, ALL BEAUTIFUL!
AH! IF HE WERE BUT MY LORD!
WERE HE BUT MINE!
PARVATI SAW SHIVA'S ADMIRING LOOKS AND WAS FULL OF ANGER.
MAY EACH ONE OF YOU BECOME A LIFE-LESS STATUE AND ADORN THE THRONE OF INDRA. THERE YOU WILL GET ALL THE ADMIRATION YOU CRAVE.

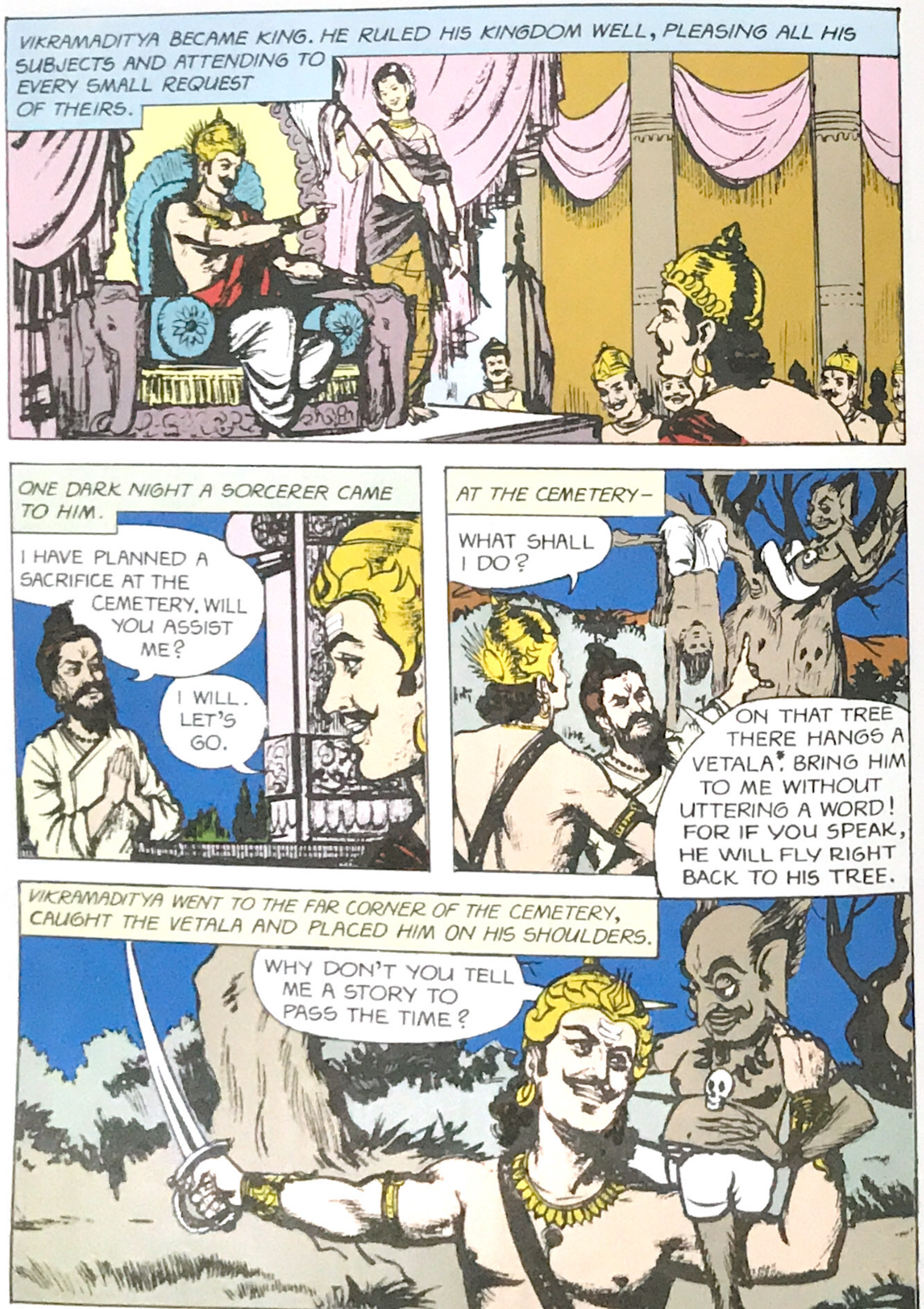
THE APSARAS WERE AGHAST.
HAVE MERCY ON US, DEAR ONE. RELEASE US FROM THIS CURSE.
PARVATI RELENTED.
THIS THRONE WILL REACH THE EARTH IN THE REIGN OF RAJA VIKRAMADITYA. CENTURIES LATER IT WILL BE FOUND BY RAJA BHOJA. WHEN HE TRIES TO MOUNT IT YOU WILL STOP HIM AND TELL HIM STORIES FROM THE LIFE OF VIKRAMADITYA. IF HE IS MAGNAN-IMOUS ENOUGH TO HEAR ALL OF YOU OUT, YOU WILL BE FREE OF THIS CURSE.

MEANWHILE ON EARTH, IN THE CITY OF UJJAINI, THERE REIGNED A KING CALLED BHARTRIHARI, WHO LOVED HIS WIFE ANANGASENA, DEARLY.
DEAREST, YOU ARE MY VERY LIFE.
SO BLIND WAS HIS LOVE THAT HE TOOK A VOW.
I WILL NOT OUTLIVE MY WIFE.
IN THAT SAME CITY THERE LIVED A LEARNED BUT POOR BRAHMAN, A DEVOTEE OF PARVATI. ONE DAY–
I AM PLEASED. CHOOSE A BOON FOR YOURSELF.
O GODDESS, GRANT ME EVERLASTING YOUTH AND IMMORTALITY.
PARVATI GAVE HIM A FRUIT.
EAT IT. IT WILL GIVE YOU BOTH.
FULL OF JOY, THE BRAHMAN TOOK THE FRUIT.

AS HE WAS ABOUT TO EAT IT–
IMMORTALITY WOULD BE WASTED ON ME, PAUPER THAT I AM. AN IMMORTAL KING WILL BENEFIT MANY.
HE GAVE IT TO BHARTRIHARI AND TOLD HIM OF ITS PROPERTIES.
IN RETURN, I GRANT YOU LANDS AND RICHES.
AFTER THE BRAHMAN HAD LEFT —
HOW CAN I EAT IT AND OUTLIVE MY WIFE!
HE SENT FOR HER.
BELOVED, EAT THIS FRUIT AND PRESERVE YOUR YOUTH AND LIFE FOREVER.
MY LORD! I AM OVERWHELMED!

BUT ANANGASENA LOVED ANOTHER.
I SHALL GIVE IT TO HIM, MY STABLE-BOY.
SHE SENT FOR THE YOUTH.
EAT THIS, MY LOVE. I WILL THEN BE SURE OF HAVING YOU ALL MY LIFE.
THE STABLE-BOY, UNFAITHFUL TO THE QUEEN, GAVE IT TO HIS BELOVED—A MAID.
DEAREST, EAT THIS FRUIT. AND I CAN BE SURE THAT DEATH WILL NOT SNATCH YOU FROM ME.
THE MAID GAVE IT TO HER LOVER – A COWHERD. BUT–
I SHALL GIVE THIS MAGIC FRUIT TO MY BELOVED, WHO FAITHFULLY CARRIES THE COW-DUNG FOR ME.
THE GIRL WHO CARRIED THE COW-DUNG WAS OVERJOYED.
I SHALL GO HOME AND BATHE, BEFORE EATING THE FRUIT.
SHE THREW THE FRUIT ON TOP OF HER BASKET OF DUNG AND WALKED MERRILY DOWN THE ROAD.

JUST THEN BHARTRIHARI, OUT ON A HUNT, PASSED THAT WAY.
THAT FRUIT! I AM SURE IT'S THE ONE THE BRAHMAN GAVE ME! I'LL TAKE IT FROM HER AND FIND OUT THE TRUTH.
AFTER CONFIRMING THAT IT WAS THE SAME FRUIT, HE SENT FOR ANANGASENA.
TAKE AN OATH THAT YOU WILL ANSWER ME TRUTHFULLY.
I WILL, MY LORD.
WHEN BHARTRIHARI LEARNT THE TRUTH HE WAS UTTERLY DISGUSTED WITH THE WORLD.
THERE IS NO GREATER ENEMY THAN ATTACHMENT, AND NO GREATER HAPPINESS THAN RENUNCIATION.
HE CALLED HIS BROTHER VIKRAMADITYA TO HIM.
I HAVE DECIDED TO BECOME AN ASCETIC. YOU SHALL REIGN IN MY PLACE.

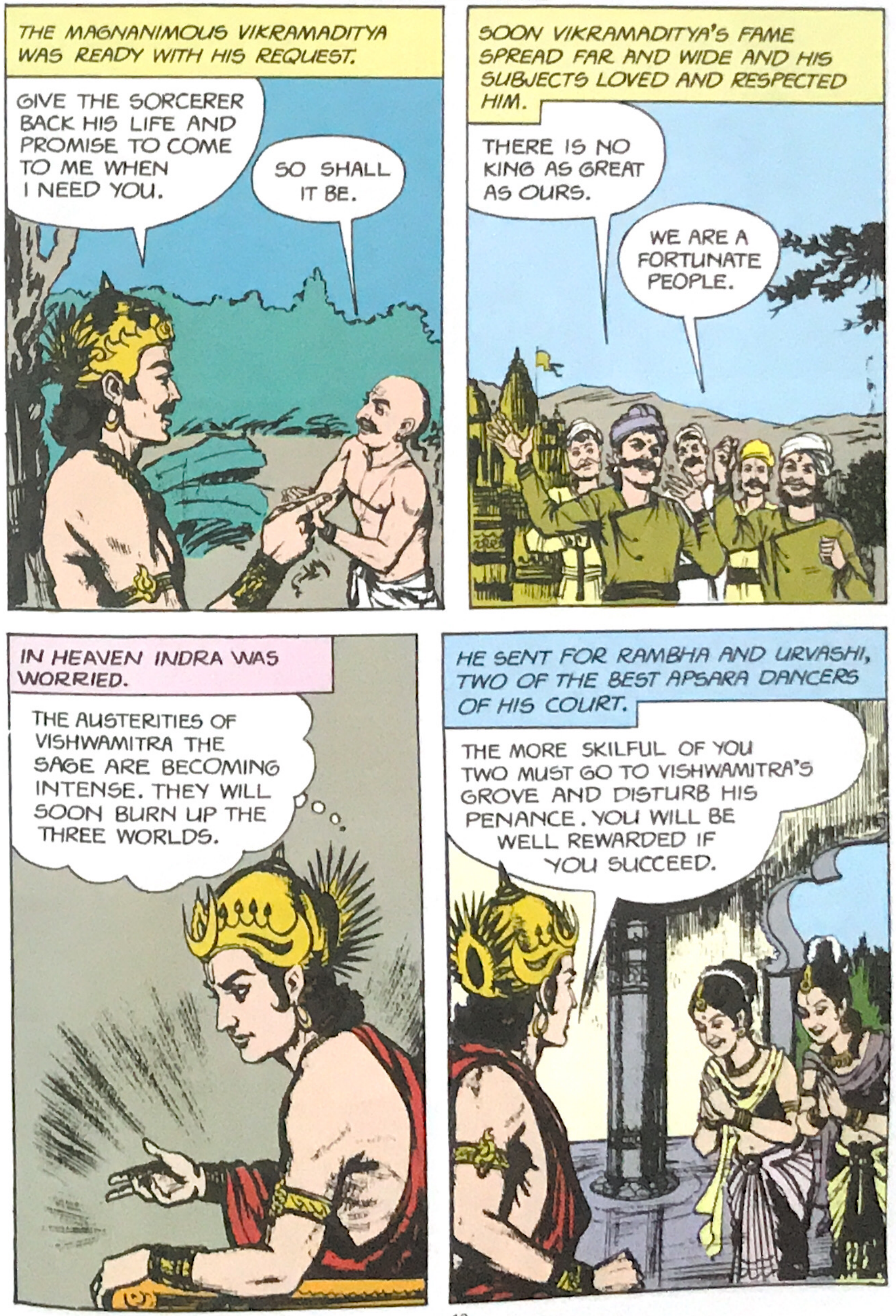

VIKRAMADITYA BECAME KING. HE RULED HIS KINGDOM WELL, PLEASING ALL HIS SUBJECTS AND ATTENDING TO EVERY SMALL REQUEST OF THEIRS.
ONE DARK NIGHT A SORCERER CAME TO HIM.
I HAVE PLANNED A SACRIFICE AT THE CEMETERY. WILL YOU ASSIST ME?
I WILL. LET'S GO.
AT THE CEMETERY–
WHAT SHALL I DO?
ON THAT TREE THERE HANGS A VETALA*. BRING HIM TO ME WITHOUT UTTERING A WORD! FOR IF YOU SPEAK, HE WILL FLY RIGHT BACK TO HIS TREE.
VIKRAMADITYA WENT TO THE FAR CORNER OF THE CEMETERY, CAUGHT THE VETALA AND PLACED HIM ON HIS SHOULDERS.
WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME A STORY TO PASS THE TIME?

WHEN VIKRAMADITYA REFUSED TO ANSWER–
YOU ARE AFRAID TO SPEAK. ALL RIGHT. I WILL TELL YOU A STORY.
AT THE END OF IT I WILL ASK YOU A QUESTION. KNOWING THE ANSWER IF YOU REFUSE TO BREAK THE SILENCE, I'LL BREAK YOUR HEAD INTO A THOUSAND PIECES.
"A CERTAIN KING HAD A SON, WHO WHILE ON A HUNT, CAME UPON A BRAHMAN PERFORMING RELIGIOUS RITES ON THE BANK OF A RIVER."
"THE KING'S SON COMMANDED THE BRAHMAN TO HOLD HIS HORSE WHILE HE DRANK WATER. THE BRAHMAN REFUSED."

"THE PRINCE, ENRAGED, STRUCK HIM WITH HIS WHIP. THE BRAHMAN RAN AND COMPLAINED TO THE KING. THE KING WAS ANGRY. HE COMMANDED THAT THE HAND WHICH STRUCK THE BRAHMAN BE CUT OFF."
"AS THE ORDER WAS ABOUT TO BE CARRIED OUT THE BRAHMAN RELENTED AND INTERVENED SAYING, 'O KING THE PRINCE ACTED OUT OF IGNORANCE. I AM SURE HE WILL NOT REPEAT THIS CRIME. FOR MY SAKE LET HIM BE PARDONED.'"
"HEARING THESE WORDS THE KING FORGAVE THE PRINCE AND THE BRAHMAN RETURNED HOME."
TELL ME O KING, OF THE TWO, THE BRAHMAN AND THE KING, WHO WAS MORE VIRTUOUS?
THE KING, OF COURSE!

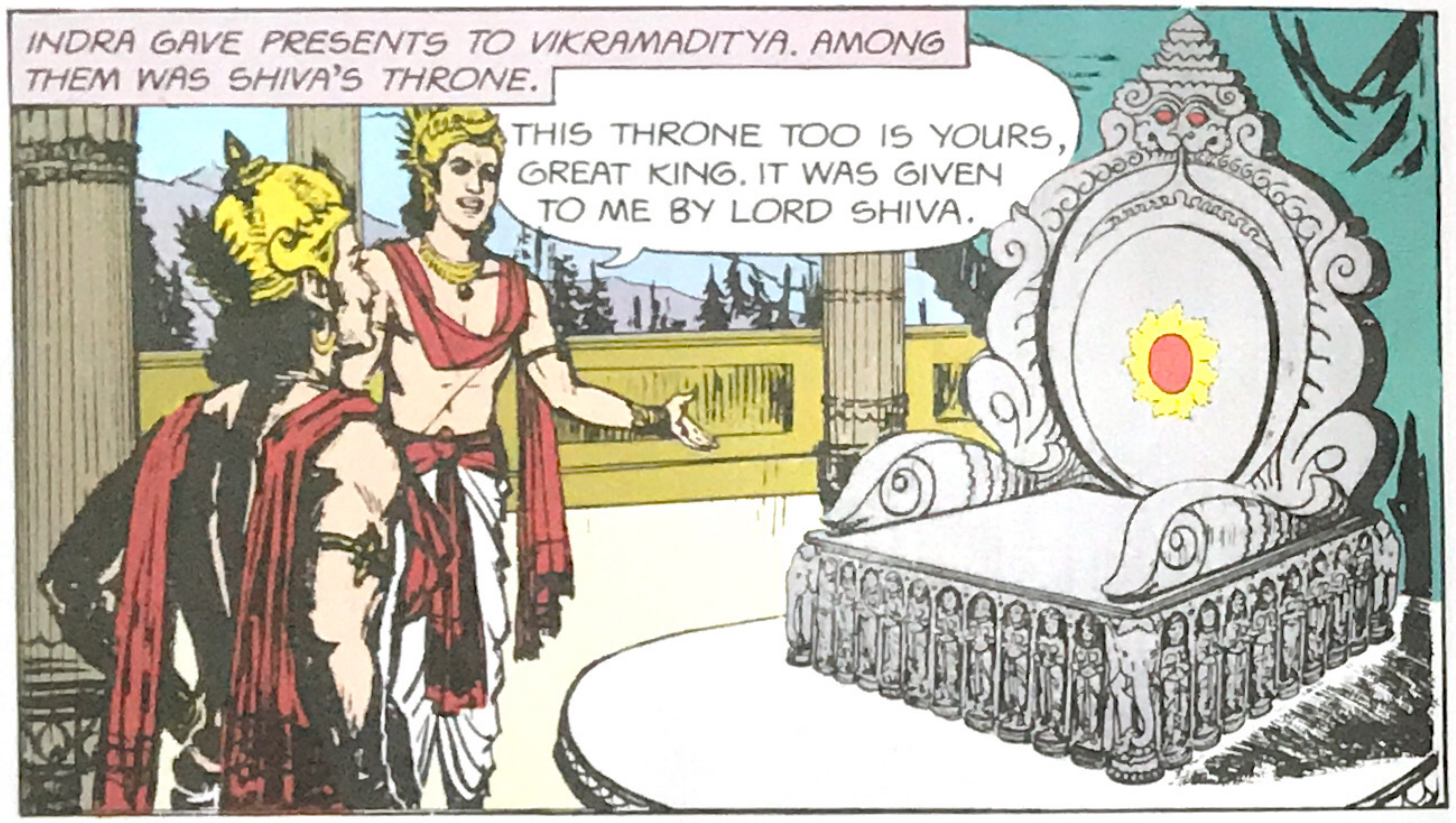
THE MOMENT VIKRAMADITYA SPOKE, THE VETALA DISAPPEARED FROM HIS SHOULDER AND WAS BACK ON THE TREE.
BUT VIKRAMADITYA WENT AFTER HIM AND ONCE AGAIN PLACED HIM ON HIS SHOULDER.
I SHALL TELL YOU ANOTHER STORY. BUT YOU MUST ANSWER MY QUESTION WHEN I FINISH. OR ELSE...
IN THIS WAY THE VETALA TOLD 24 STORIES AND 24 TIMES VIKRAMADITYA BROKE THE SILENCE AND REPLIED. BUT WHEN THE 25TH STORY WAS TOLD VIKRAMADITYA DID NOT KNOW THE ANSWER TO THE GHOUL'S QUESTION AND DID NOT SPEAK A WORD. THE GHOUL WAS FORCED TO STAY ON HIS SHOULDER AND COULD NOT ESCAPE BACK TO HIS TREE.
THIS KING IS COURAGEOUS, CLEVER AND COMPASSIONATE. I MUST WARN HIM OF THE SORCERER.
O KING, THE SORCERER INTENDS TO KILL YOU.

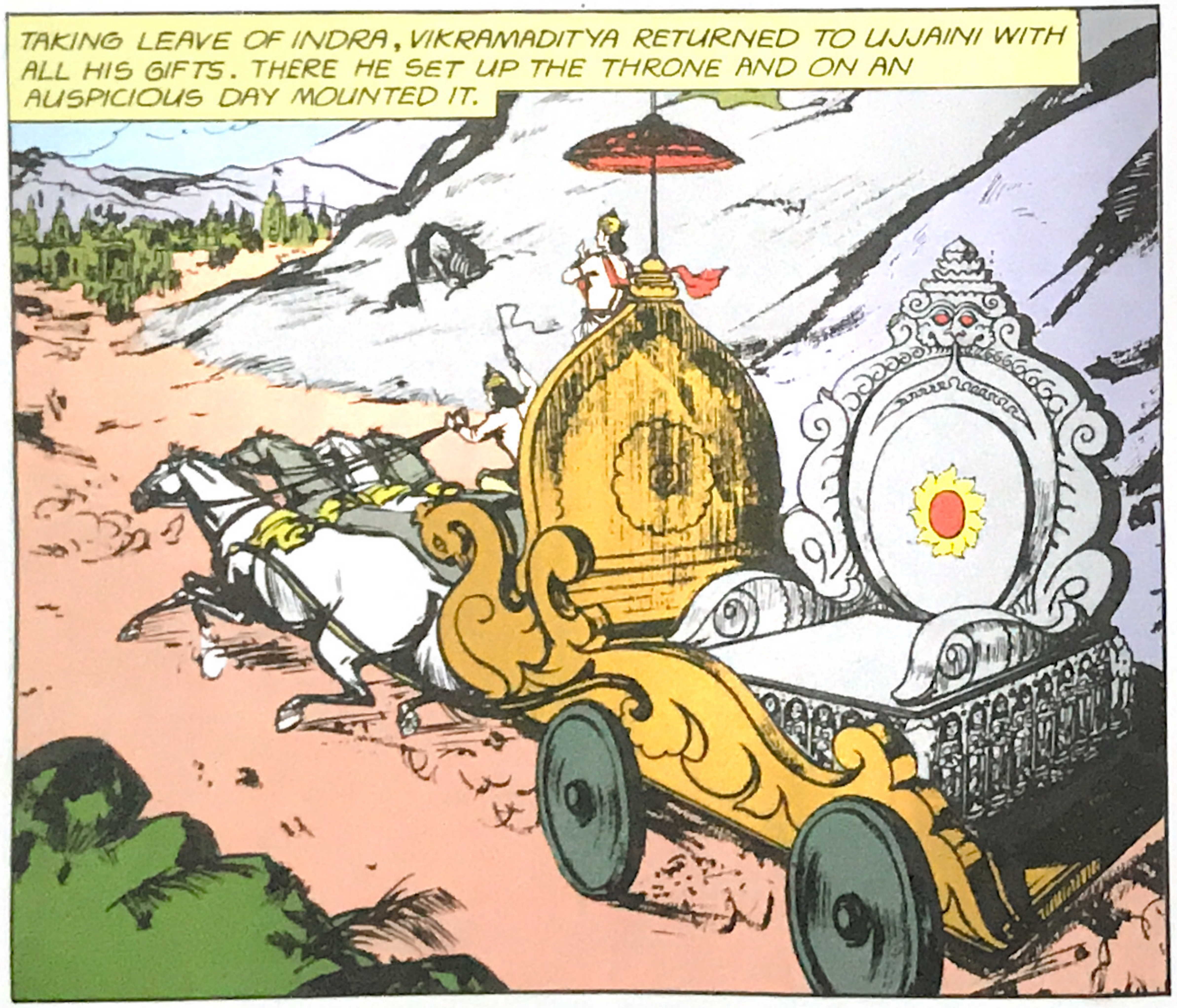
HOW ? WHY ?
WHEN YOU TAKE ME TO HIM HE WILL ASK YOU TO BOW BEFORE THE SACRIFICIAL FIRE. WHEN YOU DO SO HE WILL SLAY YOU.
WHAT SHOULD I DO?
WHEN HE ASKS YOU TO BOW...
EVERYTHING HAPPENED AS THE VETALA HAD WARNED.
NOW BOW TO THE SACRIFICIAL FIRE.
YOU WILL HAVE TO SHOW ME HOW. BEING A KING I HAVE NEVER BOWED BEFORE.
AS THE SORCERER BENT TO SHOW HIM—
AS SOON AS THE SORCERER WAS SLAIN THE VETALA BECAME A BRAHMAN AND MADE AN OFFERING OF THE SORCERER'S HEAD. THEN—
YOU HAVE MADE THE EIGHT-FOLD PROSPERITY YOURS. WHAT WILL YOU HAVE FROM ME?

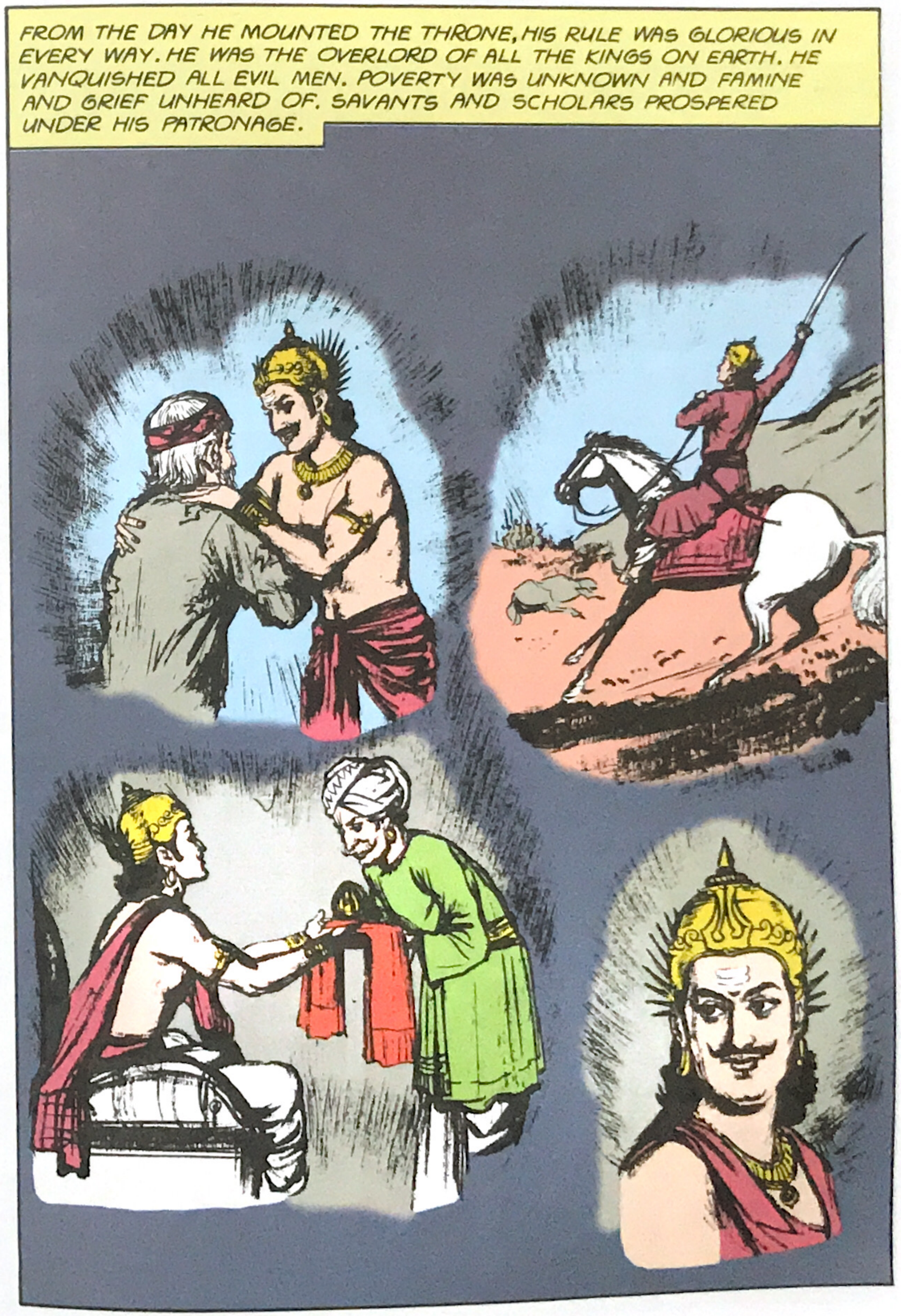

THE MAGNANIMOUS VIKRAMADITYA WAS READY WITH HIS REQUEST.
GIVE THE SORCERER BACK HIS LIFE AND PROMISE TO COME TO ME WHEN I NEED YOU.
SO SHALL IT BE.
SOON VIKRAMADITYA'S FAME SPREAD FAR AND WIDE AND HIS SUBJECTS LOVED AND RESPECTED HIM.
THERE IS NO KING AS GREAT AS OURS.
WE ARE A FORTUNATE PEOPLE.
IN HEAVEN INDRA WAS WORRIED.
THE AUSTERITIES OF VISHWAMITRA THE SAGE ARE BECOMING INTENSE. THEY WILL SOON BURN UP THE THREE WORLDS.
HE SENT FOR RAMBHA AND URVASHI, TWO OF THE BEST APSARA DANCERS OF HIS COURT.
THE MORE SKILFUL OF YOU TWO MUST GO TO VISHWAMITRA'S GROVE AND DISTURB HIS PENANCE. YOU WILL BE WELL REWARDED IF YOU SUCCEED.

I AM THE BETTER DANCER OF THE TWO. LET ME GO.
I HAVE HAD THE BEST TEACHERS. LET ME GO.
WE WILL LET THE ASSEMBLY OF GODS JUDGE. YOU SHALL COMPETE BEFORE THEM.
THE GODS WERE SO DELIGHTED WITH THE DANCING OF BOTH THAT THEY COULD NOT MAKE UP THEIR MINDS. THE SAGE NARADA AT LAST MADE A SUGGESTION.
ON EARTH IN THE CITY OF UJJAINI, RULES THE ACCOMPLISHED KING VIKRAMADITYA. HE WILL DEFINITELY BE ABLE TO DECIDE.
INDRA SENT FOR MATALI HIS CHARIOTEER.
GO TO KING VIKRAMADITYA OF UJJAINI. INVITE HIM, ON MY BEHALF, TO MY COURT TO JUDGE A DANCING COMPETITION.
VIKRAMADITYA, A LOVER OF THE ARTS, NATURALLY ACCEPTED THE INVITATION. HE RETURNED WITH MATALI IN HIS CHARIOT.

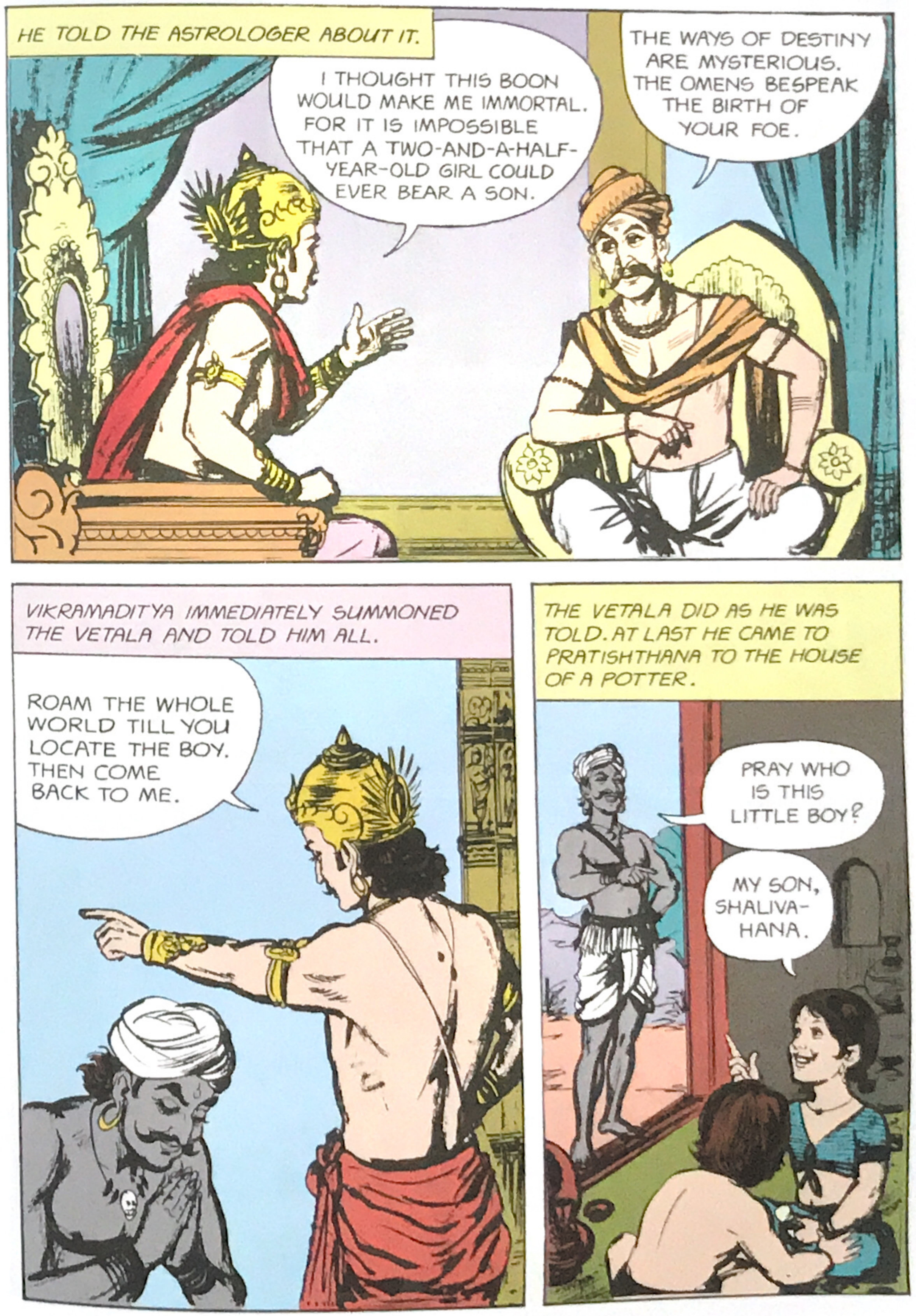
THE GREAT DAY DAWNED AND BOTH ARTISTES GAVE OF THEIR BEST.
WHEN IT WAS OVER–
URVASHI, WITHOUT A DOUBT, IS THE BETTER DANCER.
WHY DO YOU PREFER HER PERFORM-ANCE?
VIKRAMADITYA EXPLAINED AND INDRA WAS PLEASED BY HIS KNOWLEDGE OF THE SUBJECT.
YOUR DECISION SHOWS KNOWLEDGE AND INSIGHT.
HE IS A FIT OCCUPANT FOR SHIVA'S THRONE!


INDRA GAVE PRESENTS TO VIKRAMADITYA. AMONG THEM WAS SHIVA'S THRONE.
THIS THRONE TOO IS YOURS, GREAT KING. IT WAS GIVEN TO ME BY LORD SHIVA.


TAKING LEAVE OF INDRA, VIKRAMADITYA RETURNED TO UJJAINI WITH ALL HIS GIFTS. THERE HE SET UP THE THRONE AND ON AN AUSPICIOUS DAY MOUNTED IT.

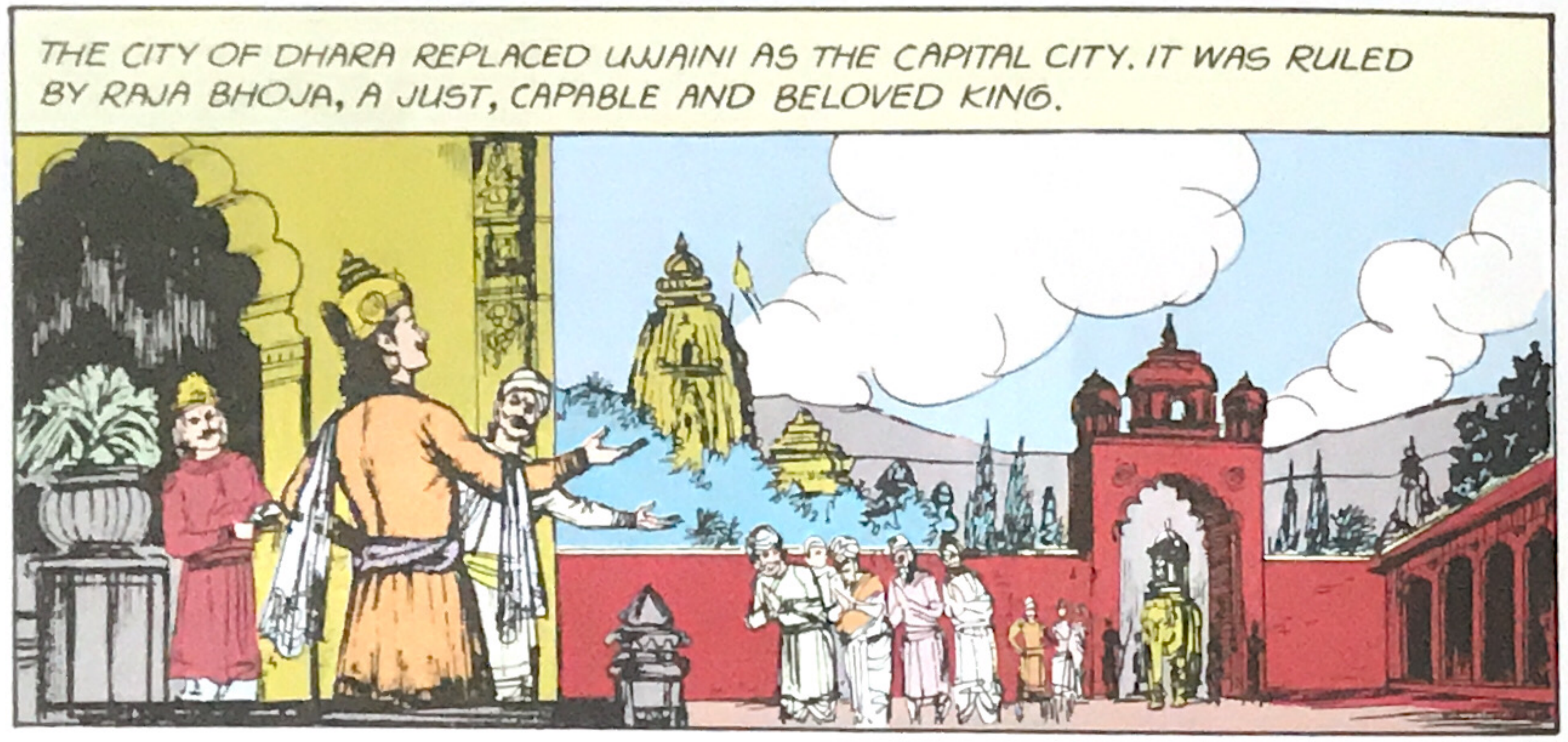

FROM THE DAY HE MOUNTED THE THRONE, HIS RULE WAS GLORIOUS IN EVERY WAY. HE WAS THE OVERLORD OF ALL THE KINGS ON EARTH. HE VANQUISHED ALL EVIL MEN. POVERTY WAS UNKNOWN AND FAMINE AND GRIEF UNHEARD OF. SAVANTS AND SCHOLARS PROSPERED UNDER HIS PATRONAGE.

THEN SUDDENLY, DAY AFTER DAY, A NUMBER OF EVIL OMENS STRUCK UJJAINI.
VIKRAMADITYA SENT FOR THE COURT ASTROLOGERS.
WHAT DO THESE OMENS MEAN ?
THEY FOREBODE ILL, O KING. YOUR LIFE IS IN DANGER.
ONLY THEN DID VIKRAMADITYA REMEMBER AN INCIDENT WHICH HAD OCCURRED YEARS AGO. HE HAD PLEASED SHIVA WITH HIS PENANCE. SO—
O KING, ASK FOR ANY BOON.
LET MY DEATH BE AT THE HANDS OF NONE BUT THE SON OF A TWO-AND-A-HALF-YEAR-OLD GIRL.
SO BE IT.


HE TOLD THE ASTROLOGER ABOUT IT.
I THOUGHT THIS BOON WOULD MAKE ME IMMORTAL. FOR IT IS IMPOSSIBLE THAT A TWO-AND-A-HALF-YEAR-OLD GIRL COULD EVER BEAR A SON.
THE WAYS OF DESTINY ARE MYSTERIOUS. THE OMENS BESPEAK THE BIRTH OF YOUR FOE.
VIKRAMADITYA IMMEDIATELY SUMMONED THE VETALA AND TOLD HIM ALL.
ROAM THE WHOLE WORLD TILL YOU LOCATE THE BOY. THEN COME BACK TO ME.
THE VETALA DID AS HE WAS TOLD. AT LAST HE CAME TO PRATISHTHANA TO THE HOUSE OF A POTTER.
PRAY WHO IS THIS LITTLE BOY?
MY SON, SHALIVAHANA.

THE ASTOUNDED VETALA SWIFTLY RETURNED TO VIKRAMADITYA.
VIKRAMADITYA THANKED HIM AND TAKING HIS SWORD SET OUT FOR PRATISHTHANA.
AS SOON AS HE REACHED THE POTTER'S HOUSE–
SHALIVAHANA HIT HIM WITH HIS TOY STAFF.
AH! AH!

THE PAIN WAS SO GREAT THAT VIKRAMADITYA FLED FROM PRATISHTHANA TO UJJAINI.
IT'S THE KING! WHAT'S THE MATTER?
MY PALACE! TAKE ME TO MY PALACE.
A FEW HOURS LATER VIKRAMADITYA, UNABLE TO BEAR THE PAIN, DIED. AFTER HIS DEATH–
THERE IS NO KING WORTHY ENOUGH TO SIT ON THIS THRONE. BURY IT DEEP DOWN IN THE EARTH, IN A PURE FIELD.
SO THE VACANT THRONE WAS BURIED.
HUNDREDS OF YEARS PASSED AND THE THRONE WAS COMPLETELY FORGOTTEN, EVEN IN LEGENDS.


THE CITY OF DHARA REPLACED UJJAINI AS THE CAPITAL CITY. IT WAS RULED BY RAJA BHOJA, A JUST, CAPABLE AND BELOVED KING.

VERY NEAR DHARA WAS A FIELD, WHICH BELONGED TO A BRAHMAN.
MY NEW FIELD IS UNUSUALLY RICH. I MUST PERSONALLY KEEP THE BIRDS OFF IT.

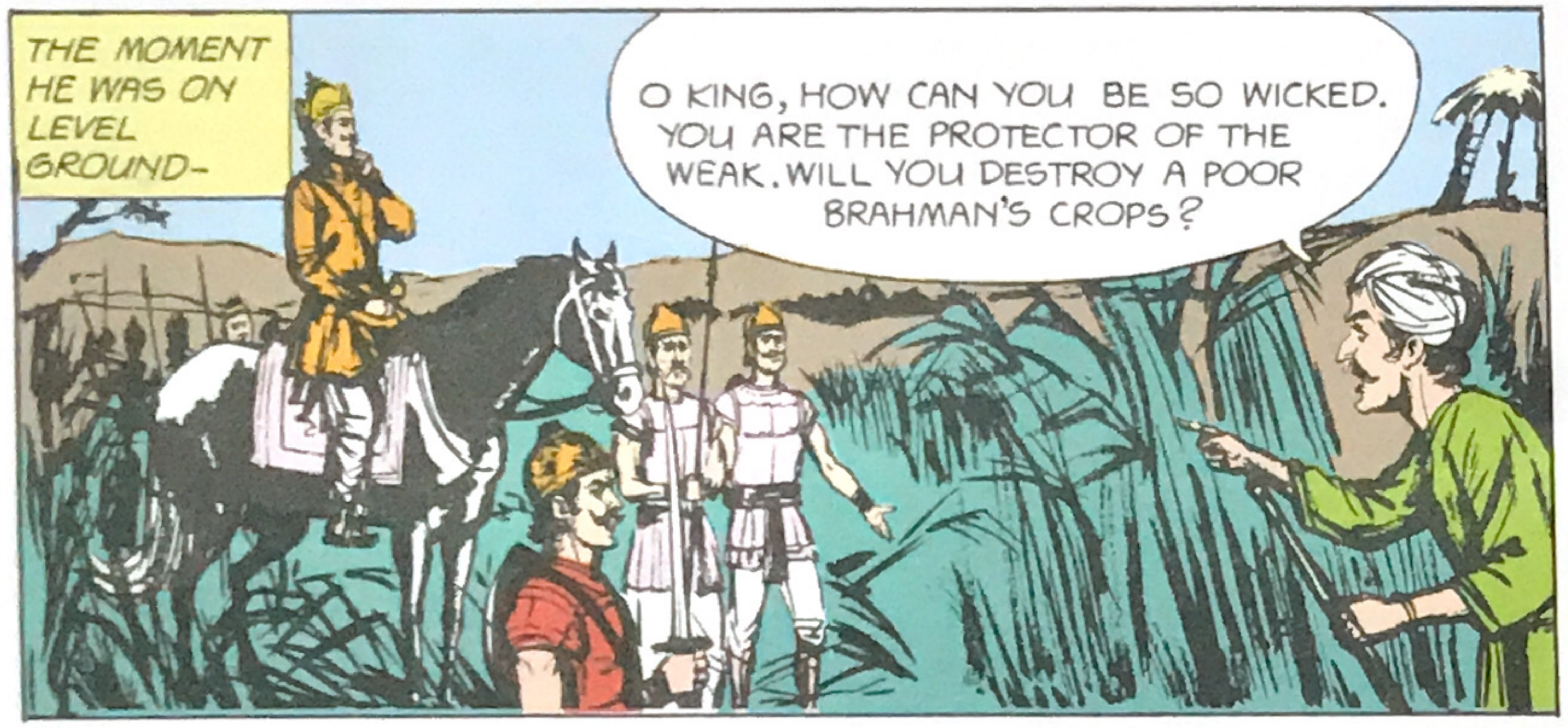
HE BEGAN LOOKING FOR A GOOD VANTAGE POINT.
AH! HERE IS A MOUND RIGHT IN THE CENTRE OF IT. I'LL BUILD A PLATFORM FROM WHICH I'LL WATCH THE FIELD.

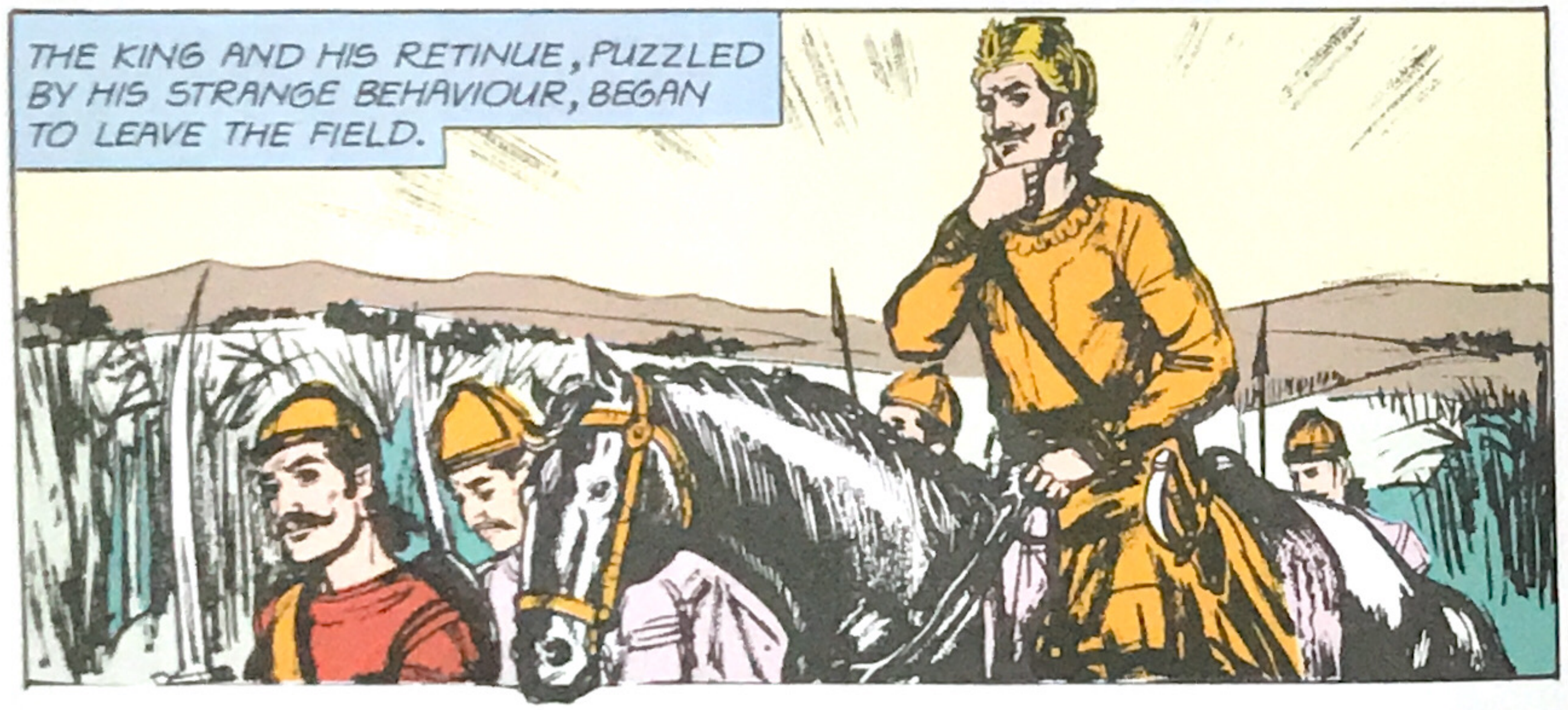
ONE DAY, RAJA BHOJA, OUT ON A HUNTING EXPEDITION, PASSED BY THE FIELD.
HOW JUICY AND THICK THESE CANES ARE. THEY MUST BE DELICIOUS!

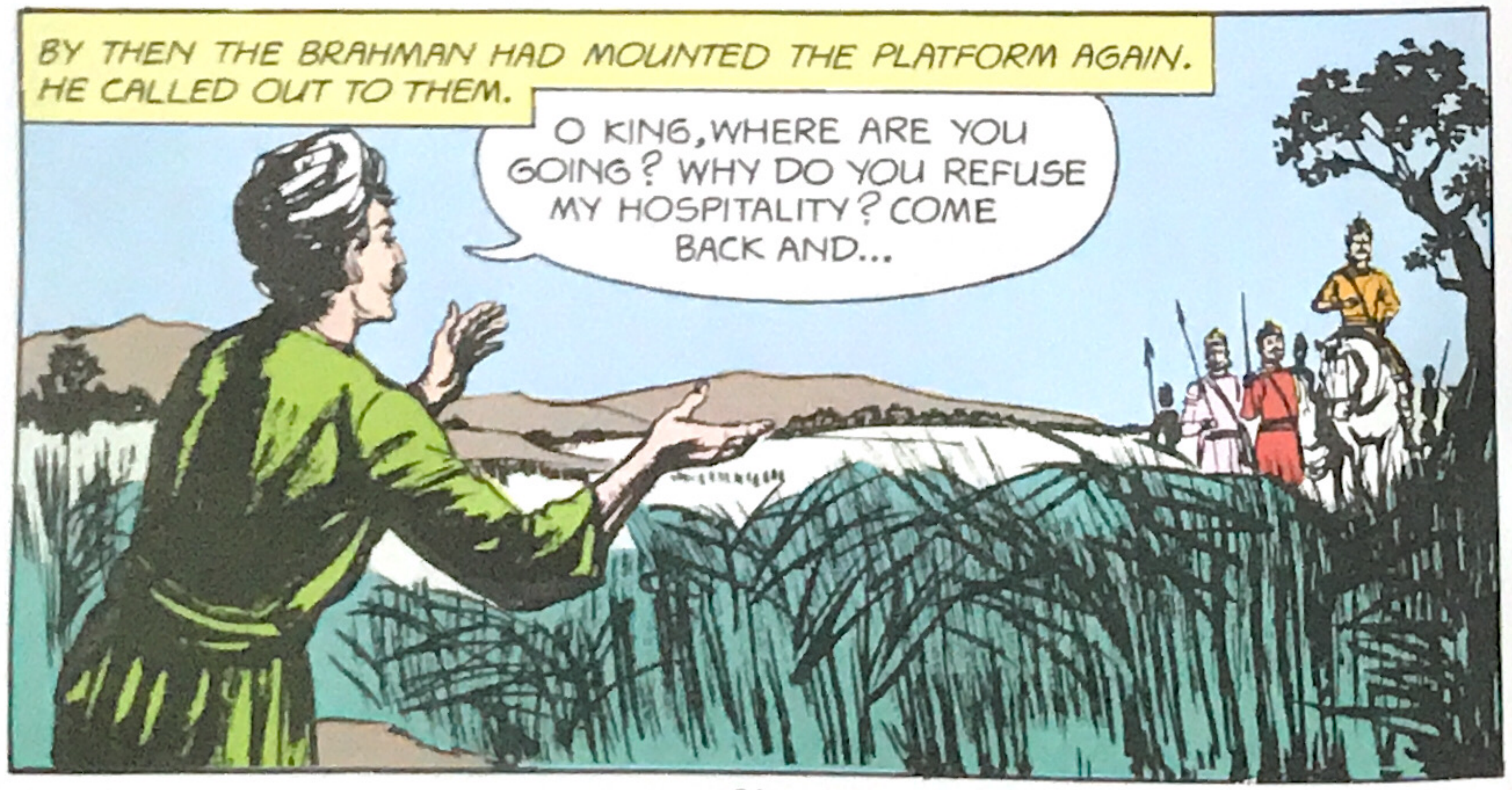
THE BRAHMAN WHO WAS WATCHING THEM FROM THE PLATFORM HEARD THEM.
O KING, COME WITH YOUR FOLLOWERS. BE MY GUESTS. QUENCH YOUR THIRST ON THIS JUICY SUGARCANE.

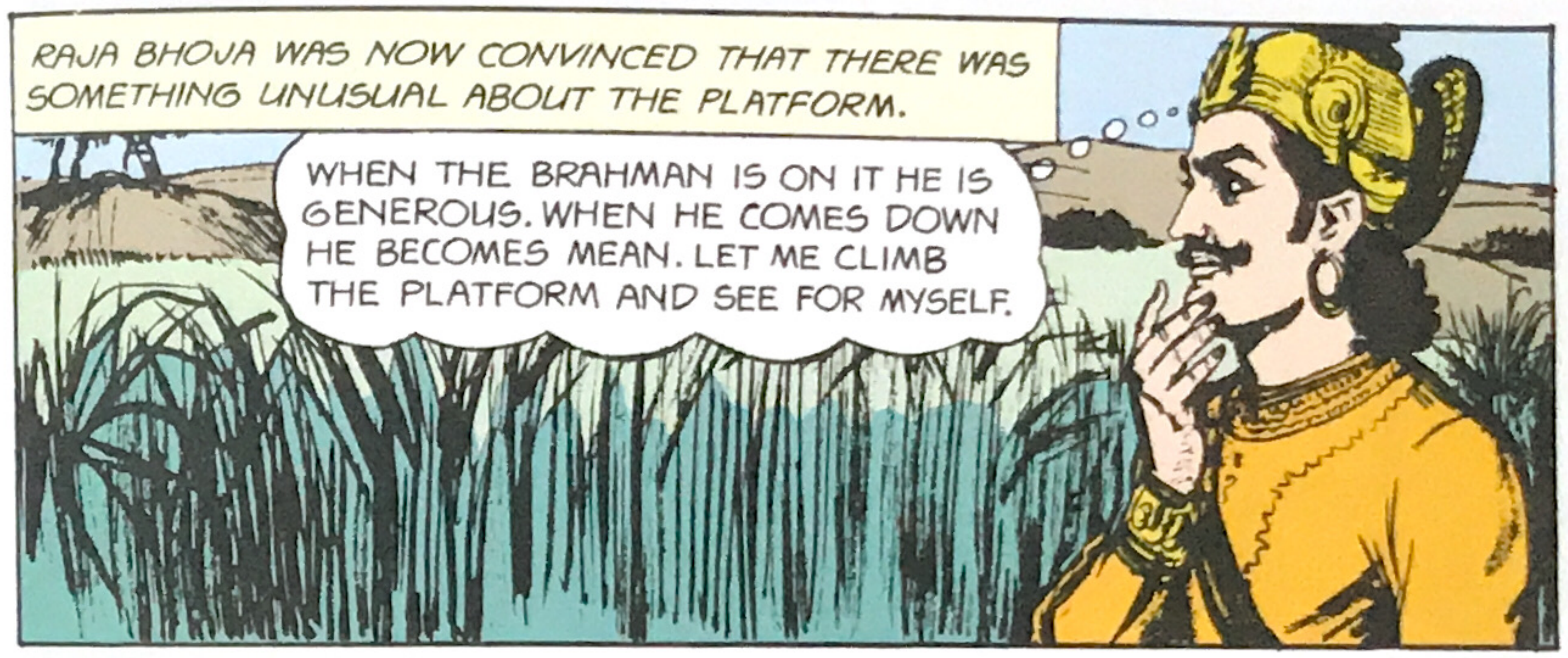
THE THIRSTY MEN WERE ONLY WAITING FOR THE INVITATION.

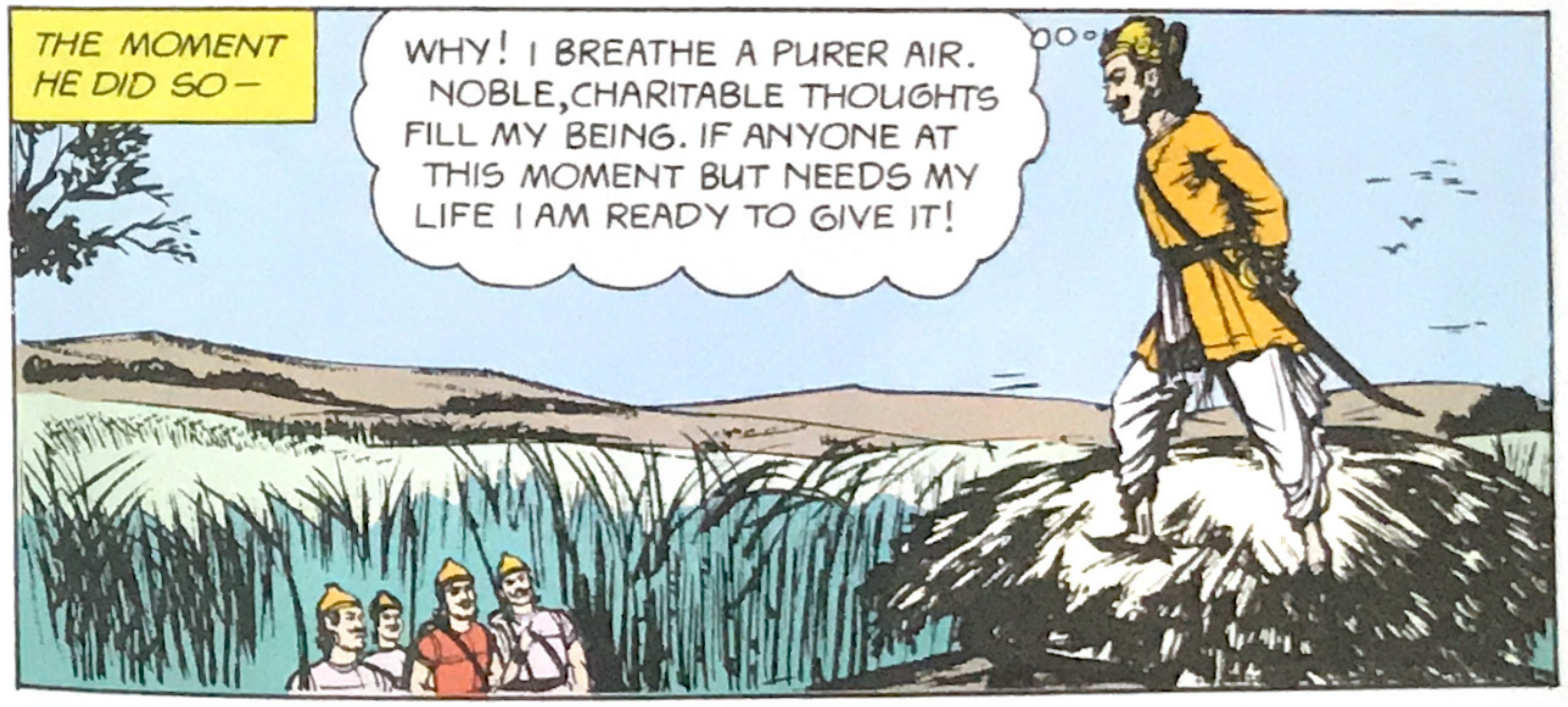
JUST THEN THE BRAHMAN CAME DOWN TO SHOO AWAY SOME CROWS.


THE MOMENT HE WAS ON LEVEL GROUND–
O KING, HOW CAN YOU BE SO WICKED. YOU ARE THE PROTECTOR OF THE WEAK. WILL YOU DESTROY A POOR BRAHMAN'S CROPS?

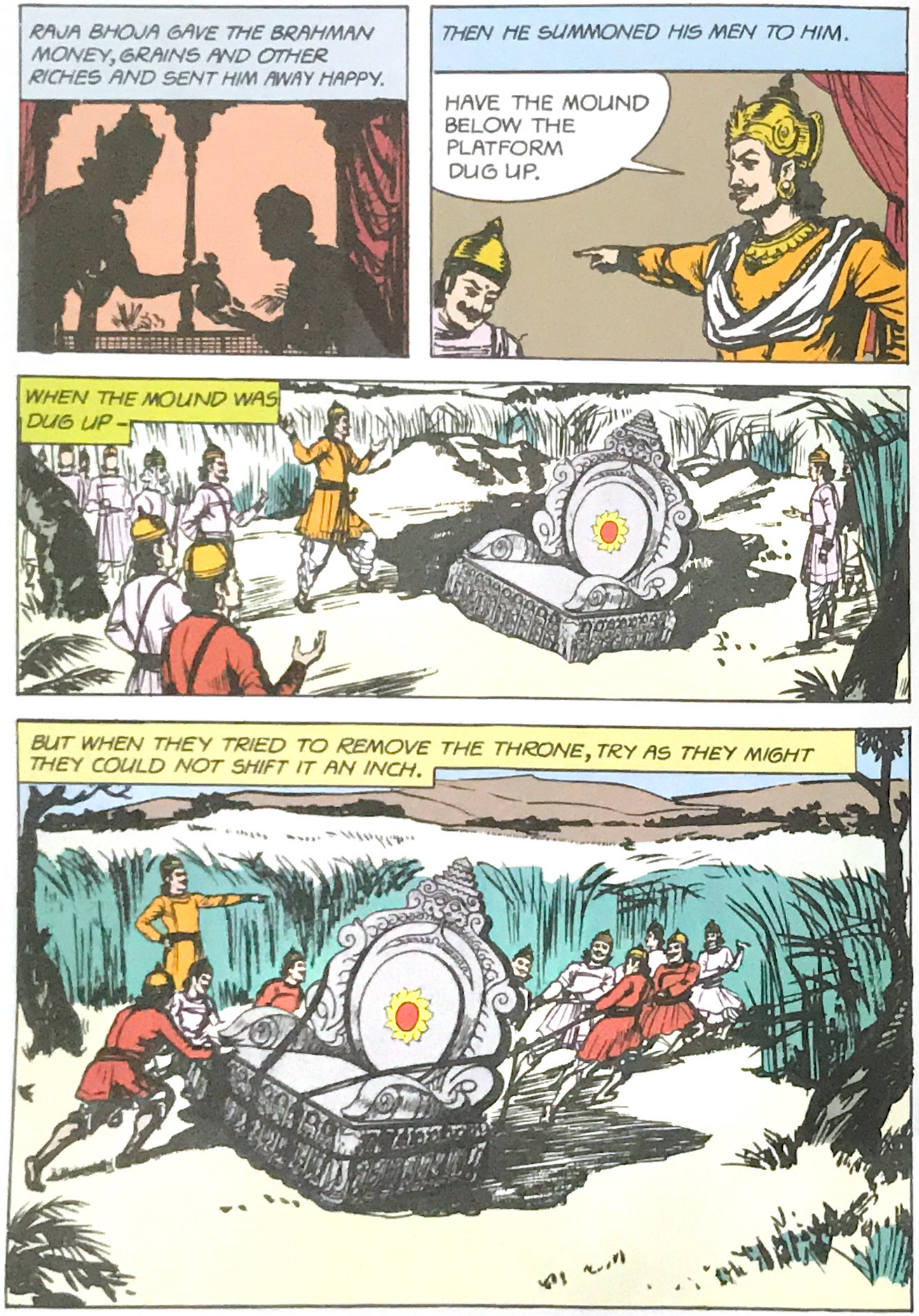

THE KING AND HIS RETINUE, PUZZLED BY HIS STRANGE BEHAVIOUR, BEGAN TO LEAVE THE FIELD.

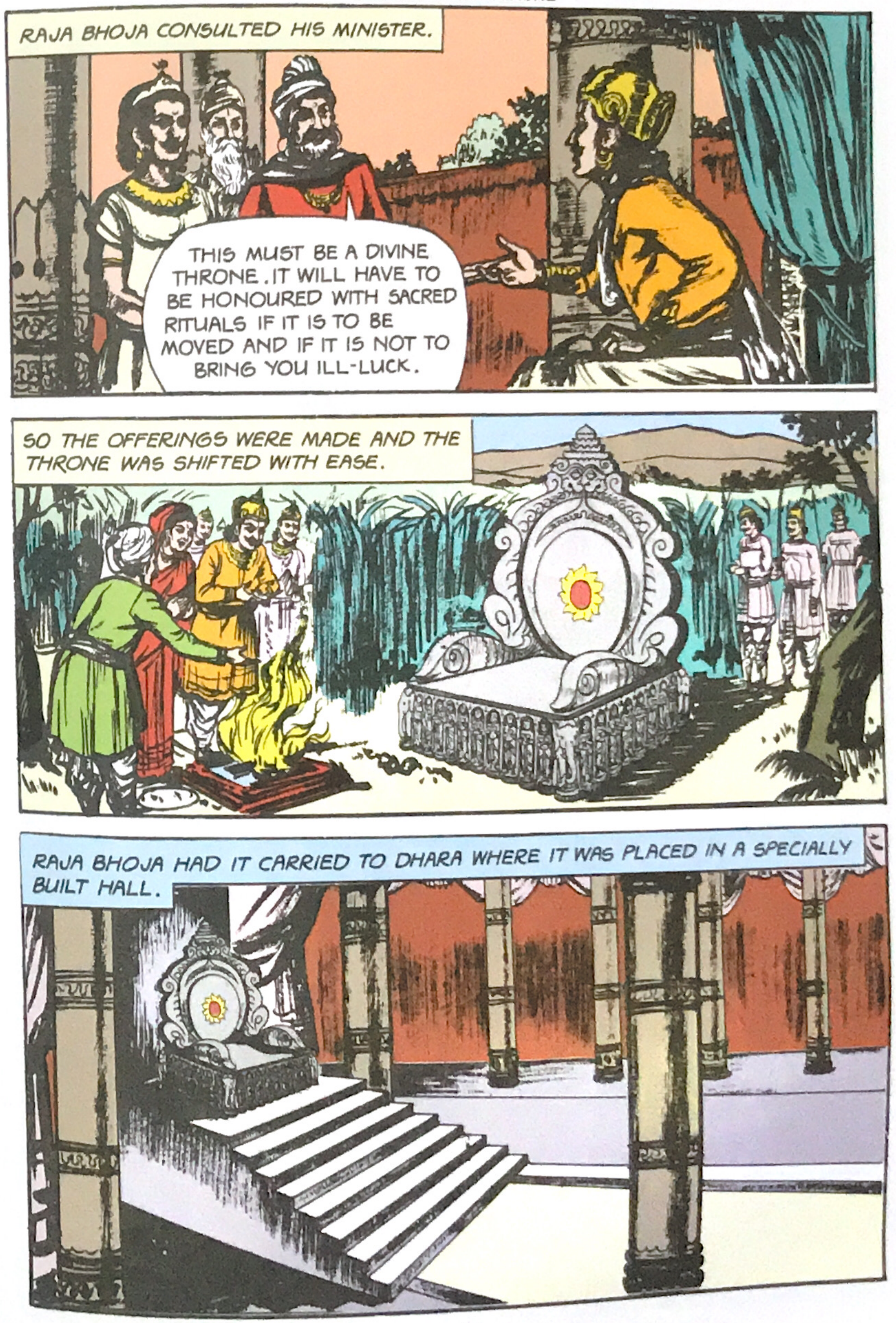

BY THEN THE BRAHMAN HAD MOUNTED THE PLATFORM AGAIN. HE CALLED OUT TO THEM.
O KING, WHERE ARE YOU GOING? WHY DO YOU REFUSE MY HOSPITALITY? COME BACK AND...


RAJA BHOJA WAS NOW CONVINCED THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING UNUSUAL ABOUT THE PLATFORM.
WHEN THE BRAHMAN IS ON IT HE IS GENEROUS. WHEN HE COMES DOWN HE BECOMES MEAN. LET ME CLIMB THE PLATFORM AND SEE FOR MYSELF.


THE MOMENT HE DID SO–
WHY! I BREATHE A PURER AIR. NOBLE, CHARITABLE THOUGHTS FILL MY BEING. IF ANYONE AT THIS MOMENT BUT NEEDS MY LIFE I AM READY TO GIVE IT!

HE WENT UP TO THE BRAHMAN.
I WISH TO BUY THIS FIELD FROM YOU. HOW MUCH IS IT WORTH?
AS MUCH AS YOU DEEM FIT.


RAJA BHOJA GAVE THE BRAHMAN MONEY, GRAINS AND OTHER RICHES AND SENT HIM AWAY HAPPY.
THEN HE SUMMONED HIS MEN TO HIM.
HAVE THE MOUND BELOW THE PLATFORM DUG UP.
WHEN THE MOUND WAS DUG UP -
BUT WHEN THEY TRIED TO REMOVE THE THRONE, TRY AS THEY MIGHT THEY COULD NOT SHIFT IT AN INCH.


RAJA BHOJA CONSULTED HIS MINISTER.
THIS MUST BE A DIVINE THRONE. IT WILL HAVE TO BE HONOURED WITH SACRED RITUALS IF IT IS TO BE MOVED AND IF IT IS NOT TO BRING YOU ILL-LUCK.
SO THE OFFERINGS WERE MADE AND THE THRONE WAS SHIFTED WITH EASE.
RAJA BHOJA HAD IT CARRIED TO DHARA WHERE IT WAS PLACED IN A SPECIALLY BUILT HALL.

THEN ON AN AUSPICIOUS DAY, HE MADE READY TO ASCEND IT.
A VOICE STOPPED HIM.
STOP! O KING! ONLY ONE POSSESSING ALL THE MAGNANIMITY AND THE OTHER RARE VIRTUES OF THE OWNER OF THIS THRONE MAY MOUNT IT.
I POSSESS ALL THE VIRTUES NEEDED TO ASCEND THIS THRONE.

AN UPRIGHT MAN DOES NOT BOAST ABOUT HIS OWN VIRTUES. YOUR VANITY DISQUALIFIES YOU.
RAJA BHOJA WAS ASTONISHED AND ASHAMED.
YOU ARE RIGHT. ONE WHO PRAISES HIS OWN VIRTUES IS NO BETTER THAN A FOOL. DO TELL ME OF THE MAGNANIMITY OF HIM TO WHOM THIS THRONE BELONGED.
THIS IS THE THRONE OF VIKRAMADITYA. HE COULD EASILY PART WITH A CRORE OF GOLD PIECES IF A SUBJECT NEEDED IT. MOUNT THE THRONE IF YOU CAN EQUAL HIM.
I CANNOT.
IN THIS MANNER RAJA BHOJA MADE THIRTY-TWO ATTEMPTS TO MOUNT THE THRONE. EACH TIME A STATUE TOLD HIM A STORY DESCRIBING THE MAGNANIMITY OF RAJA VIKRAMADITYA. HE HAD TO HONESTLY ADMIT TO HIMSELF THAT HE WAS NOWHERE NEAR THE GREAT VIKRAMADITYA AS FAR AS KINGLY VIRTUES WENT.

AT LAST AFTER THE THIRTY-SECOND STATUE HAD TOLD ITS STORY ABOUT RAJA VIKRAMADITYA'S GREATNESS AND RAJA BHOJA HAD PATIENTLY AND HUMBLY HEARD IT–
DO NOT REMAIN SILENT. YOU TOO ARE A GREAT, GLORIOUS, GENEROUS KING. YOUR PATIENCE AND MAGNANIMITY HAVE RELEASED US FROM A CURSE.
RAJA BHOJA WAS UTTERLY BEWILDERED.
FROM WHAT CURSE? HOW HAVE I HELPED YOU?
BY LISTENING PATIENTLY TO OUR TALES ON THE VIRTUES OF RAJA VIKRAMADITYA.
THEY TOLD HIM ALL ABOUT PARVATI'S CURSE AND HOW SHE HAD RELENTED. THEN –
IS THERE ANY WISH OF YOURS THAT WE CAN FULFIL?

YES. LET THE ADVENTURES OF VIKRAMADITYA BECOME IMMORTAL UPON EARTH. LET ALL WHO HEAR THEM BE SAFE FROM ANY DANGER.
SO BE IT.
RAJA BHOJA PLACED THE THRONE IN A SHRINE INLAID WITH BRIGHT GOLD AND THE NINE PRECIOUS GEMS. UPON IT HE PLACED THE IMAGES OF SHIVA AND PARVATI AND WORSHIPPED BOTH, THE THRONE AND THE DEITIES.
THEN MOUNTING THE THRONE HE RULED WISELY AND WELL TILL THE END OF HIS DAYS.